

HOW TO KEEP THE CX FLOWING SMOOTHLY

**Gas South's human-centered, technology-enabled
approach.**

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GAS SOUTH'S HUMAN-CENTERED, TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED APPROACH.



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Few customer experiences (CXs) are more important than those delivered by energy companies, such as natural gas suppliers.

These businesses must meet the critical needs of individual residential and organizational customers, providing heat, fuel for ovens and stoves, electricity, energy for commercial and industrial processes, and vehicle propulsion. They must also serve entire communities, like where their employees live.

With natural gas supply deregulated in some states, like Georgia, customers can switch suppliers or minimize or even end their gas use by going to alternative energy sources, such as electricity, oil, and propane, if they become dissatisfied.

JENNI HAWKINS

On the flip side, should electricity, oil, and propane customers become dissatisfied with these sources and their suppliers, natural gas is an option, provided it can readily be connected to their premises and if they are willing to invest in gas-powered appliances, heating, and other systems.

While natural gas delivery by local distribution companies is highly reliable, wholesale market conditions, weather, and customer usage can cause gas costs and customer bills to fluctuate (also see **BOX**).

The connection point to the customers is the contact center. The ability of agents to authentically understand and respond to their issues is critical to maintaining their loyalty. That also means ensuring that the agents remain connected and protected.

THE GAS SOUTH STORY

Gas South is a leading natural gas supplier headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. The company serves nearly 500,000 residential, commercial, industrial, and wholesale customers across several southern, mid-Atlantic, and midwestern states.

Founded in 2006, Gas South, a subsidiary of Cobb EMC, utilizes gas distribution companies, notably Atlanta Gas Light, to deliver the fuel to its customers' premises.

The company's mission, according to Jenni Hawkins, Vice President of Customer Care, Gas South, "is to be the energy provider of choice by delivering exceptional value, service, and simplicity.

"We are also purpose-driven: giving back 5% of our annual profits to organizations that support children in need. That commitment to being a 'Fuel for Good' is central to who we are and how we serve our customers and communities."

To learn more about how Gas South does just that, enabled and assisted by its contact center teams, I had a virtual conversation with Jenni.

Q WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES, BUT ALSO THE OPPORTUNITIES, YOU HAVE IN RETAINING/MAINTAINING THE LOYALTY/REFERRAL PROPENSITY OF YOUR CUSTOMERS? IN GROWING YOUR CUSTOMER BASE AND REVENUES?

A: In a deregulated natural gas market, customers can switch providers, subject to their contract terms, so loyalty isn't a given: it's earned through trust, transparency, and exceptional, people-first service.

We operate in an environment where fluctuating natural gas markets can drive price volatility, and cold weather can lead to higher usage and affordability concerns for customers. That makes it critical to deliver not just competitive rates, but also clarity and support.

We differentiate with consistently competitive and transparent pricing: no deposits, no hidden fees, and no surprises on our bills.

Just as importantly, we differentiate through the service experience. Our team members are highly skilled at helping customers select the right plans and navigate any financial challenges through flexible payment options and connections to support resources.

We are also committed to responsiveness – answering 85% of calls within 90 seconds in 2025 – which reinforces our brand as accessible and customer-focused.

The results are measurable, with strong customer satisfaction, thousands of 5-star Google reviews, and continued market share growth.



AT A GLANCE

1. HOW MANY AGENTS DO YOU HAVE?

-- Approximately 100

2. WHAT IS YOUR CONTACT VOLUME (ANNUALLY)?

-- 700,000-plus contacts

3. WHAT IS THE SPLIT BETWEEN INBOUND AND OUTBOUND?

-- Mostly inbound, with some targeted service outreach occasionally

4. WHAT IS THE SPLIT BETWEEN INBOUND CHANNELS?

--87% phones, 6% chat, 7% email

5. ARE YOUR AGENTS IN-HOUSE OR OUTSOURCED AND IF SO, WHAT IS THE SPLIT?

--100% of frontline, customer-facing agents are in-house

6. HOW MANY AGENTS ARE ON-PREMISE AND HOW MANY ARE REMOTE?

--Agents are hybrid following in office new-hire training, coming into the office monthly for engagement day activities like training, team meetings, business updates, leader roundtables, socials, and community service.

7. WHERE ARE YOUR ON-PREMISE AGENT CONTACT CENTERS AND REMOTE AGENTS LOCATED?

--Atlanta, Georgia and Gainesville, Florida

8. WHAT ARE THE KEY CONTACT CENTER TECHNOLOGIES THAT YOU USE?

--Oracle Customer Information System, Five9 phone system, Verint Workforce Management, PowerBI for reporting/dashboards

Q OUTLINE YOUR CUSTOMER CARE OPERATIONS. WHAT CHANNELS DO YOU USE TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS?

A: We operate in a fully omnichannel environment, supporting more than 700,000 customer contacts annually across phone, email, chat, and digital channels.

While 87% of our interactions are still voice-based, we continue to invest in robust self-service capabilities through our website, mobile app, automated phone system, and chatbot for easy transactions for customers who prefer ease, speed, and convenience.

At the same time, we make it intentionally easy to connect with a live agent: because we know that for complex or sensitive situations, a human connection matters most.

Our Customer Care team supports the full lifecycle of the CX, including enrollment for service, plan selection, renewals, billing inquiries, payments, and transfer service from one location to another.

We think about customers and where they are, offering extended hours including evenings and Saturdays, while ensuring consistent, reliable support across all channels.

"...WE MAKE IT INTENTIONALLY EASY TO CONNECT WITH A LIVE AGENT: BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT FOR COMPLEX OR SENSITIVE SITUATIONS, A HUMAN CONNECTION MATTERS MOST."

-- JENNI HAWKINS

Q LET'S DISCUSS FURTHER YOUR CONTACT CENTER. WHAT FUNCTIONS DOES IT PROVIDE? HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHICH CONTACTS ARE HANDLED BY AUTOMATED AGENTS VERSUS LIVE AGENTS?

A: Customer Care provides end-to-end support while contributing to growth through new customer acquisitions and partnerships such as Gas South Advantage, which brings our customers additional value with discounts on home services.

We take a human-centered, technology-enabled approach to service. We think about contact handling in three tiers:

1. Self-service for ease, speed, and convenience.
2. Assisted service for efficiency and expertise.
3. Human interaction for our people-first approach of empathy and trust.

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Automation is used where it enhances the CX: handling simple, transactional needs such as payments, service transfers, and account management.

However, we intentionally prioritize live agents for complex or sensitive interactions, such as high bill concerns, financial hardship situations, and nuanced customer questions.

Our agents are direct hires, trained in-house, and deeply connected to the customers we serve. That local understanding allows them to provide personalized, empathetic support that technology alone can't replicate.

Q HOW DO YOU SUPPLY YOUR LIVE AGENTS? IN-HOUSE? BPO? WHERE AND HOW (ON-PREMISE, REMOTE)?

A: We made a deliberate decision to operate with a 100% in-house, community-based workforce. We believe CX is too core to our mission, purpose, and values to outsource.

Our agents live in the communities we serve, which enables them to relate more authentically to our customers and understand local nuances. This approach strengthens both CX and our connection to the community.

Our Customer Care organization operates across two primary locations – Atlanta, Georgia and Gainesville, Florida – with a hybrid workforce model.

Team members primarily work remotely once proficient following new hire training. Agents come into the office monthly for face-to-face recurrent training, collaboration, engagement activities, and community service.

Q WHAT FACTORS LED TO YOUR STRATEGY? WHEN AND HOW DID YOU EXECUTE IT? WHAT WERE YOUR GOALS? WERE THERE ANY CHALLENGES AND IF SO, HOW WERE THEY OVERCOME? WHAT WERE THE RESULTS, AND HOW DID THESE COMPARE WITH YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

A: One of the most transformational decisions in our company's history was bringing Customer Care fully in-house, which we did in 2012.

By transitioning to a direct-hire model, we aligned our frontline teams more closely with our mission, purpose, values, and customer expectations. This shift resulted in stronger hiring outcomes, reduced attrition, deeper expertise through tenure and in-house training, and a more cohesive culture.

Since implementing this strategy, we have continuously invested in creating a distinct, values-based CX. The results have exceeded expectations with record levels of customer satisfaction, sustained business growth, and consistently strong employee engagement scores.



Our agents feel connected to the company's mission and are supported through competitive compensation, career development opportunities, and unique benefits such as sabbatical and profit-sharing programs. This investment in our people has been a key driver of our success.

Q HOW DO YOU HIRE/RECRUIT, TRAIN, COACH, ENGAGE, AND RETAIN YOUR AGENTS? MANAGE AGENT SCHEDULING AND ADHERENCE? ARE YOUR METHODS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED AGENTS DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN OTHER DEPLOYMENT/LOCATION TYPES AND IF SO, HOW, AND WHY?

A: Because all our agents are Gas South employees, we hire for both skills and mindset: prioritizing customer focus, transparency, empathy, teamwork, and adaptability.

Training is delivered in-house using internal resources, structured materials, and peer mentoring. New hires are supported by experienced trainers who routinely serve customers to remain proficient themselves and other seasoned peers, accelerating both learning and cultural integration.

Ongoing coaching is a critical component of our model. Leaders provide feedback in regular one-on-ones, supported by performance dashboards that give agents visibility into their strengths and opportunities.

We invest heavily in tools and resources, including a user-friendly knowledge base and emerging AI technologies that streamline processes and reduce manual work, allowing agents to focus on meaningful customer interactions.

Operationally, we have expectations around reliability and schedule adherence but we also strive to provide flexibility so that agents can manage their personal and work lives.

We also prioritize engagement and recognition. Programs such as our Excellence Expedition program celebrate top performers and create opportunities for cross-location connection with peers and leaders to show appreciation for outstanding performance.

"OPERATIONALLY, WE HAVE EXPECTATIONS AROUND RELIABILITY AND SCHEDULE ADHERENCE BUT WE ALSO STRIVE TO PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY SO THAT AGENTS CAN MANAGE THEIR PERSONAL AND WORK LIVES."

Q HOW DO YOU PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY-BASED AGENTS FROM OUTAGES? IN DISASTERS? SHOULD THE AGENTS HAVE TO EVACUATE, AND UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTACT VOLUME MAY LIKELY SPIKE IN SUCH EVENTS, HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE CONTACT LOAD?

A: Redundancy and preparation are central to our resilience strategy. With teams across multiple locations, we can shift workload in response to regional disruptions, for example, redistributing contacts between Florida and Atlanta during severe weather events.

We have established downtime procedures that allow agents to continue supporting customers even during system interruptions, including capturing information and following up as needed.

Agents also have access to nearby offices for in-person tech support if required for equipment issues or home internet disruptions: one of the reasons we hire within a close radius of our offices.

In addition, we maintain formal disaster recovery plans to ensure continuity during larger-scale disruptions. While we rarely need to activate these plans, being prepared allows us to continue delivering reliable service to our customers when they need it most.

Q WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR GAS SOUTH?

A: Our focus is expanding our customer base while deepening our impact in the communities we serve.

HANDLING SUDDEN PRICE HIKES

Energy suppliers, like natural gas companies, sometimes face sudden price hikes that occur mostly for reasons beyond their control. Events that understandably cause customer contacts to spike.

So, we asked Jenni Hawkins, Gas South how her company informs customers of these matters, and, equally critically, trains its agents how to respond to customers when they reach out to them.

"While natural gas prices can fluctuate due to market conditions, our customer care team works closely with customers to understand their needs, explain their plan options, and recommend solutions that can help minimize the impact of market volatility," says Jenni.

"For example, many customers choose fixed-rate plans that lock in the rate-per-therm for the duration of their contracts, although the monthly bill varies based on usage, taxes, Atlanta Gas Light charges, and applicable fees.

"Others benefit from our OnePrice Plan, which allows them to pay the same amount every month, plus taxes, for a flat-rate gas bill.

"When customers do reach out with concerns, our agents are trained to lead with empathy, provide clear information, and help customers identify the solutions that best fit their situation."

As we grow, so does our ability to give back. Our commitment to contributing 5% of profits to support children in need remains a core part of our purpose.

We also continue to innovate in the CX space. Like many organizations, we are thoughtfully exploring the role of emerging technologies. We see AI as an enabler – not a replacement – for our people.

Our approach is to use technology to eliminate manual tasks, improve efficiency, and empower our team members so they can focus on building meaningful connections with our customers who drive long-term loyalty.

Q WHAT ARE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTACT CENTERS FACING SIMILAR CHALLENGES, ISSUES, AND OPPORTUNITIES?

A: To summarize our approach, it comes down to a few key principles:

1. Hire for empathy and mindset, not just technical skill.
2. Build culture intentionally.
3. Coach to behaviors, not just metrics.



4. Invest in career development and growth opportunities.
5. Ensure leaders model servant leadership and organizational values, and most importantly, listen to your frontline team. They are closest to your customers and see pain points and opportunities more clearly than any dashboard ever will. 



Brendan Read is Editor of Contact Center Pipeline. He has been covering and working in customer service and sales and for contact center companies for most of his career. Brendan has edited and written for leading industry publications and has been an industry analyst. He also has authored and co-authored books on contact center design, customer support, and working from home. Brendan can be reached at brendan@contactcenterpipeline.com.

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